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METHODICAL PRINCIPLES OF A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT UK UNIVERSITIES

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the methodical principles of a bachelor's degree in international relations at UK universities. It shows that the educational process in the UK system of university education has long adjusted to intensive-fundamental learning, rather than extensive one. It has led to the selection of productive forms and methods of implementing new content of a bachelor's degrees in international relations, as well as restructuring the interaction between university teachers and students. Thus, university teachers now act as organizers of cognitive activities and students as active participants in scientific-creative cognitive activities. A theoretical analysis of relevant scientific, analytical sources and pedagogical practices shows that Ukrainian and foreign scholars have presented some valuable findings on specialist training in the UK. At the same time, the issue in question has not been fully scientifically revealed yet. The article justifies that in the UK, professional training of future bachelors in international relations adheres to methodological approaches and principles, which ensure a) the continuity of education and self-education, b) free access to a bachelor's degree, c) the consideration of students' needs and experience, d) the introduction of innovative approaches in the content of degree programmes and curricula to make them professionally oriented, flexible and mobile, e) the efficiency of learning and practical activities, f) the development of professional and creative skills. Finally, the article concludes that a rational combination of innovative forms, methods, and learning technologies contributes to developing professional competence in future bachelors in international relations. High-tech resources (online learning, library resources, free access to the world's Internet resources) will enable high-quality educational services.

Keywords: *a bachelor's degree, international relations, the UK, university, professional training, methodical principles.*

АНОТАЦІЯ

Стаття присвячена методичним засадам професійної підготовки бакалаврів міжнародних відносин в університетах Великої Британії. Зазначено, що педагогічний процес у системі університетської освіти Великої Британії уже давно перейшов на інтенсивно-фундаментальне навчання замість екстенсивно-інформаційного, що зумовило відбір продуктивних форм і методів реалізації нового



змісту магістерської підготовки міжнародників, перебудову відносин між викладачем і студентом, докорінну зміну їх ролі в педагогічному процесі: перетворення викладача на організатора пізнавальної діяльності, а студента – на активного суб'єкта науково-творчої пізнавальної діяльності. Аналіз наукових, аналітично-інформаційних джерел, педагогічного досвіду показав, що українськими та зарубіжними науковцями накопичено значний досвід вивчення професійної підготовки фахівців у Великій Британії. Водночас, системне вивчення досліджуваної проблеми не стало предметом окремого наукового пошуку. Обґрунтовано, що професійна підготовка бакалаврів міжнародних відносин в університетах Великої Британії будується на основі методологічних підходів та принципів, реалізація яких сприяє забезпеченню неперервності у навчанні і самонавчанні; вільному доступу до отримання бакалаврської освіти; врахуванню індивідуальних особливостей, потреб і досвіду; впровадженню інноваційних підходів у розробку змісту освітніх програм і планів для забезпечення їхньої професійної спрямованості, гнучкості та мобільності; підвищенню ефективності навчальної і практичної діяльності бакалаврів та її результативності; розвитку професійних умінь і творчих здібностей тощо. Підсумовано, що раціональне поєднання інноваційних форм, методів та технологій навчання сприяє формуванню фахової компетентності бакалаврів міжнародних відносин. Високотехнологічні ресурси (онлайн-навчання, бібліотечні ресурси, вільний доступ до світових інтернет-ресурсів) забезпечують надання високоякісних освітніх послуг.

Ключові слова: перший бакалаврський рівень, міжнародні відносини, Велика Британія, університет, професійна підготовка, методичні засади.

INTRODUCTION

Educational activities within a bachelor's degree in international relations form a systemic unity of instructional-theoretical, instructional-practical, and independent activities. It must be noted that the educational process in the UK system of university education has long adjusted to intensive-fundamental learning, rather than extensive one. It has led to the selection of productive forms and methods of implementing new content of bachelor's degrees in international relations, as well as restructuring the interaction between university teachers and students. Thus, university teachers now act as organizers of cognitive activities and students as active participants in scientific-creative cognitive activities.

The effectiveness of learning, practice and research activities largely depends on the use of innovative pedagogical forms, methods, tools, and technologies that constitute the structural and didactic core of professional training for bachelors in international relations. Involving students in these activities allows them to acquire the most in-demand professional qualities, knowledge, skills, competencies. The most important are the following: focusing on teamwork; implementing corporate communication in companies; ensuring interpersonal interaction; being tolerant during professional and joint activities; being able to change social roles while working in a team; trusting in oneself and others when performing professional tasks; striving for cooperation.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

Thus, the article aims to analyze the methodical principles of a bachelor's degree in international relations at UK universities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

A theoretical analysis of relevant scientific, analytical sources and pedagogical practices shows that Ukrainian and foreign scholars have presented some valuable findings



on specialist training in the UK. In particular, the UK education system has been justified by such Ukrainian research N. Avshenyuk, N. Bidyuk, T. Byts, I. Brandybura, T. Desiatov, O. Hohua, L. Holub, K. Istomina, Y. Kyshchenko, N. Mukan, O. Pichkar, L. Pukhovska, V. Tretko et al. One should also pay particular attention to the studies of foreign scholars on theoretical and practical aspects of professional training for specialists in international relations. These are as follows: methods and forms of professional training (C. Archer, M. Miller, V. Asal, J. Kratoville); the content of professional training (J. Bean, G. Gibbs, C. Justice, J. Rice, W. Warry); the use of ICTs in professional training of specialists in international relations (L. Golich, M. Boyer, P. Franko, A. Lee, M. Pettigrove, M. Fuller, M. Healey, F. Jordan, B. Pell, C. Short); approaches, principles, and methods of assessment (P. Bromley, C. Gormley-Heenan, S. Lightfoot). At the same time, the issue in question has not been fully scientifically revealed yet.

Given the scope of the paper, research methods include analysis, synthesis, generalization, and systematization.

RESULTS

In the UK, professional training of future bachelors in international relations adheres to methodological approaches and principles, which ensure a) the continuity of education and self-education, b) free access to a bachelor's degree, c) the consideration of students' needs and experience, d) the introduction of innovative approaches in the content of degree programmes and curricula to make them professionally oriented, flexible and mobile, e) the efficiency of learning and practical activities, f) the development of professional and creative skills.

Importantly, learning forms at UK universities assume an optimal combination of different teaching components. These are the following: lectures, seminars, tutorials (classes conducted with the help of active learning methods, aimed at mastering certain material, and monitoring the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities); classes in large and small groups, as well as individual classes; student and teacher conferences; teacher-student interactions (face-to-face communication, using information technology and, in some cases, specially designed teaching materials). Such methods, forms and approaches promote the development of professionally important skills and abilities in future bachelors in international relations. They include the ability to outline the main aspects of the topic, as well as concentration, memorization, and content filtering skills. Using the method of specific situations in seminars teaches future specialists to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. At the same time, independent and group work, nonlinear thinking skills allow them to develop personal qualities which are crucial to professional success. Professional training of future specialists in international relations involves scheduled meetings of university teachers and students (as already mentioned, in lectures, seminars or individual tutorials). It must be noted that future bachelors are entitled to design their schedules independently.

A detailed study of British pedagogical literature allows one to identify several scientific-educational trends associated with different visions on the concept of "teaching method": *theoretical-methodological* (Gibbs, 2009) – a general concept of teaching methods and ways of their classification that justifies classification-related indicators and features to differentiate teaching methods); *psycho-pedagogical* (Healey, Jordan, Pell, & Short, 2010) – a method is shown through flexible concepts, such as educational action, task, interaction, as well as methods of the psycho-pedagogical process (developing



students' thinking and observation skills; *individualization-related* (Justice, Rice, & Warry, 2007) – actualizing an individual experience of innovative teachers.

One can observe a rather peculiar pattern in the use of teaching methods in the UK higher education system: the more thorough the knowledge of any science represented by a course, the more specific the used teaching methods. Accordingly, British pedagogical science operates with general teaching methods. On the one hand, there is an optimal combination of diverse and non-standard teaching methods and on the other hand, of traditionalism and stability. In the UK, productive forms, and methods of introducing new aspects of a bachelor's degree in international relations are viewed as structured ways of interaction in the educational process. In certain conditions, they can actualize some personality traits, which are later generalized into stable quality states. This interpretation proves the general concept of professional training, namely, a set of pedagogical systems that create a holistic educational process and are congruent with the structure of a harmonious personality.

The introduction of innovative pedagogical technologies plays a significant role in modelling the effective professional training of bachelors in international relations. As noted by Lee, Pettigrove, & Fuller (2010), the quality of teaching directly depends on the scientific-creative use of effective methods and technologies, which should shift towards active, individual, independent, dia(poly)logical, inclusive, and remote ones, taking into account the specifics of academic courses, age-related and psychological characteristics of students. At the same time, future specialists should be able to cooperate and interact in small groups, analyze, and comprehend their actions, trust themselves and others when performing professional tasks, change social roles.

In the UK, the most common forms of learning are lectures, seminars, practical classes, laboratory classes, conferences, scientific-theoretical readings, educational trips, tutorials, workshops, placements, formative and summative assessment, consultations, didactic games, independent work, individual research tasks, reports on the study of educational and scientific literary sources. A bachelor's degree in international relations mostly covers the use of such methods as heuristic discussions, problem-based lectures, press-conference lectures, presentations, reports, debates, writing analytical essays, simulations, role-playing games, studies, statistical analysis exercises, student-led working groups. These methods are effective in mastering theoretical aspects of international relations, while the applied provisions of international relations require a different teaching methodology based on the principles of empirical learning. Most UK universities also offer teaching methods that involve gaining professional experience through real-world research projects, internships, community research, meetings with political science practitioners. It must be noted that empirical teaching methods in bachelor's programmes on international relations improve the quality of training, as well as helps one solve the issues related to citizenship, employment, and personal development.

Archer, & Miller (2011) claim that professional training in the field of international relations acts as a favourable environment for using active pedagogical technologies. Active learning is an effective tool for consolidating high-level academic skills of international relations students, such as critical thinking (Archer & Miller, 2011). Besides, it aims to improve students' ability to apply complex theories and concepts in specific international situations, potentially providing a better understanding of theoretical material. Active learning also provides university teachers with tools to update disciplinary



knowledge since students can join current political and international processes and learn about current trends in international relations. A variety of active learning methods can meet the needs of students with different learning styles, ages, and backgrounds. The most effective methods of active learning within a bachelor's degree in international relations are simulations, role-playing games, debates, problem-based methods, and case studies.

Indeed, the simulation method recreates a crisis-ridden international political situation in which students take full responsibility for the unfolding events and the settlement of the conflict. Each participant is given a role that involves communication, negotiation and problem-solving in collaboration with other students. Relevant scientific sources contain numerous examples of using simulations in the field of international relations. They cover such topics as election campaigns, legislative processes, foreign policy activities; the Council of Europe, etc. Participants are involved in negotiations, alliances, trade, diplomacy, and the use of military force, given the limitations imposed by agreements between states, economic factors, and cultural norms (Asal, & Kratoville, 2013). Such simulations can be based on fictional international systems, current or historical events. Simulations often last for several weeks, go beyond the audience and require one to prepare a significant amount of material. This makes them an interesting form of learning with effective results in terms of learning outcomes. Still, they are time-consuming and rather inflexible.

Role-playing games serve as an alternative to simulations, given that they are also based on a political scenario and involve students performing certain roles. They are a more flexible option and can be used during lectures or seminars. It must be noted that role-playing games require clear instruction on student roles, policy scenarios, and goals. They help one gain personal experience in a safe and supportive environment (Gormley-Heenan, & Lightfoot, 2014).

Different types of debates can also be used within a bachelor's degree in international relations. Political debates focus the participants' attention on the elaboration of practical recommendations to implement certain provisions, ideas and are based on the presentation of practical and statistical evidence. Using debates, university teachers can acquaint students with a wide range of controversial political issues, demonstrate different views and approaches to their solution, thus promoting the development of cognitive (critical thinking), emotional (generating interest in the field) and activity-related (communication and teamwork skills) areas of an international relations student's personality. Students should write a reflective essay to show their own experience of participating in the debate. Those students who were not directly involved in the debate should prepare a report summarizing each party's position, giving the most convincing arguments, and stating why they agreed with each position.

Another effective method is problem-based learning which enables students to study a certain topic by solving a problem. It helps students develop flexible knowledge, collaboration and problem-solving skills via self-directed learning. Problem-based learning scenarios emphasize the importance of finding a solution to a problem, not just the solution itself. Working in groups, students determine what information they need to solve the problem. Also, problem-based learning provides tools for preparing students to analyze, interpret, or integrate new situations or information.

UK universities employ a certain model of implementing problem-based learning. This model consists of the following stages: defining basic terms; formulating a problem; brainstorming and later structuring the obtained results; setting objectives; working independently (students study theoretical material, search for additional sources, determine



ways to solve problems); discussing (students report on ways to solve the problem, compare results, and exchange views); conducting a reflective analysis.

A detailed analysis of modules and programme specifications on international relations at UK universities indicates that the case study method is actively used in the professional training of future specialists in international relations. Traditional cases in international relations contain detailed additional information, covering historical and statistical data, provisions of government policy, arguments of various national agencies (Archer, & Miller, 2011). The main objectives of the case study method are to teach students to distinguish basic information from secondary; to identify the problem and characterize its parameters; to discover ways to solve the problem; to formulate a strategy and action plan; to make effective decisions (Golich, Boyer, & Franko, 2000). The case study method helps international relations students to understand complex issues, explore interrelated processes, discuss decision-making in problem areas, and engage in critical thinking and analysis (Bean, 2011). Group work on cases improves interpersonal and teamwork skills (Bromley, 2013). Finally, this method promotes interdisciplinary thinking since solving a problem in the real world requires materials from different fields of knowledge (Archer, & Miller, 2011).

At the same time, many UK universities successfully use the latest technologies in the professional training of future specialists in international relations. These are e-learning, interactive surveys, blogging during placements, and podcasting.

Recently, the virtual learning environment (VLE) has been used as a way to support the learning of bachelors in political science. Evidence suggests that it helps improve the quality of educational services via the use of new technologies. Professional training of international relations students mostly focuses on the ability of the VLE to provide structured links to materials only available online (government publications, materials related to current events, general election statistics), as well as direct students to websites related to their degree. The VLE relieves the pressure on learning resources using electronic publications. It also allows university teachers to prepare tasks for formative assessment to identify problems in student learning, as well as to address issues such as plagiarism and citation skills.

Independent work is considered as a purposeful activity (individual or collective) and a form of the educational process, which involves the planned learning and research activities of students under the guidance of the university teacher outside the classroom. It is an important and necessary component in the professional training of bachelors in international relations. Besides, independent work is aimed at acquiring additional knowledge and skills to analyze, synthesize, objectively and critically evaluate educational and scientific information, formulate views on international relations in writing (essay writing, reports). It enables the student to create his or her culture, erudition, and readiness for future professional activities.

Healey, Jordan, & Short (2010) pay considerable attention to this form of work. It is during independent work that helps one consolidate knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom, expand, and deepen theoretical material, develop skills and abilities to work with scientific sources and perform tasks of laboratory work and organize, plan and control activities, systematize information, strengthen professional competence, autonomy, and scientific-cognitive activity.

The main principles of independent work are complexity, systematicity and continuity, as well as correspondence of independent work tasks to sources of information. At the same time, university teachers should consider the following factors to organize



independent work of bachelors in international relations effectively: to ensure a rational combination of classroom and independent work; to provide relevant methodological material to make independent work a creative process; to monitor the success of students and provide them with proper assistance if needed.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, a scientifically justified combination of optimal forms, rational methods and innovative learning technologies contributes to developing professional competence in future bachelors in international relations. The very process of development requires a balanced and consistent scientific-methodical approach to shaping each component during both classroom and independent learning. In turn, this will lead to high levels of professional performance in various areas. High-tech resources (online learning, library resources, free access to the world's Internet resources) will enable high-quality educational services.

Further research should deal with research training of future bachelors in international relation at UK universities.

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